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Defeating ISIL Is Global Challenge, U.S. Envoy Says

by General John Allen



In early June of this year, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters poured down the Tigris Valley. Multiple cities fell. The northern approaches to Baghdad were exposed to ISIL. Iraq was under siege, poorly governed and alone in the world.

Six months later, and less than three months since the president called for an international effort against ISIL and I was appointed special envoy to the global coalition to counter ISIL, 60 nations met in Brussels on December 3 to demonstrate their shared commitment to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. It is an expression of the threat ISIL poses to global security that so many partners came together so quickly to confront this emergency. It is also a powerful testament to the importance of American leadership. No other nation could bring together such a diverse coalition to tackle a challenge this complex like the United States.

At this first ministerial-level meeting in Brussels, the Iraqi government also demonstrated its commitment to becoming a more proactive partner in the fight against ISIL. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi updated the coalition on the unity government's efforts to take important steps to benefit all Iraqis, including efforts to implement significant judicial-sector reforms, and to root out decay and corruption in Iraq's security apparatus. Indeed, in recent weeks, Abadi removed two dozen generals and publicly disclosed the results of a government-sponsored investigation revealing thousands of ghost soldiers on the Iraqi military's rolls. And just days before we met in Brussels, Baghdad signed a critical oil deal with the Kurds on revenue management and oil exports.

Iraq's continued progress toward reform and inclusiveness will be imperative to the coalition's success. There was recognition in Brussels, however, that ISIL is not solely an Iraqi problem. Nor is it solely a Syrian problem. ISIL is an international problem and demands a sustained international response.

Under U.S. leadership, the coalition is responding to the global threat posed by ISIL with a coordinated global effort. So far, eight coalition partners are taking part in airstrikes over Iraq. Six nations are participating in strikes in Syria. As of early December, there have been more than 1,200 strikes against ISIL targets. And each time we have coordinated coalition air support with Iraqi forces on the ground, ISIL's momentum has been halted and it is now constantly looking over its shoulder for the next attack.



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While the immediate focus remains to degrade and defeat ISIL in Iraq, we and coalition partners will continue to strike at ISIL in Syria to deny them safe haven and to disrupt their ability to project power. We are having an impact in Syria; we have struck at ISIL's command-and-control nodes, supply lines, fighters and leaders, and military and economic infrastructure and resources in Syria. We have also debilitated ISIL's oil producing, processing and transportation infrastructure. This is critical given that the smuggling and sale of oil provides ISIL with as much as \$1 million per day.

Of course, we cannot hope to defeat ISIL through military action alone. Coalition partners are now in leading roles to stop the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, to limit ISIL's financing, and to defeat ISIL where it can do incredible harm: in the virtual space and marketplace of ideas. Nations as diverse as Morocco, Germany and Kuwait have helped to steer these efforts. And when millions of men, women and children have been displaced by ISIL's barbarism, dozens of nations have stepped up to make significant humanitarian contributions, and will continue to need to do so, in order for the region to regain stability and for innocent civilians affected by conflict to regain hope for the future.

Across each of these lines of effort, the coalition's ultimate success against ISIL will depend on our commitment, our creativity and our coordination. We also cannot truly defeat ISIL for the long term if we do not use this unique moment in history to take action as a community of nations to address the underlying political, economic and social issues that have allowed ISIL's toxic and destructive ideology to flourish.

This is an ambitious task and generational work. But we take on this challenge with a growing and diverse coalition of partners. If we can remain united in this common effort both to defeat ISIL and to lay the foundations for a more stable Middle East, we will have left a legacy that is far more powerful than the defeat of one intolerant and nihilistic group of terrorists. We will have laid the foundation for a world that is more tolerant, more secure and more prosperous.

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